



HALIASTUR LEUCOSTERNUS.

J. Gould and H. C. Richter del et lith.

C. Hollman del. Imp.

HALIASTUR LEUCOSTERNUS, *Gould.*

White-breasted Sea-Eagle.

White-breasted Rufous Eagle, Lath. Gen. Hist., vol. i. p. 218.

Haliaeetus leucosternus, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., Part V. p. 138; and in Syn. Birds of Australia, Part III.

Girrenera, Aborigines of New South Wales.

Me-ne-ü-roo, Aborigines of the Cobourg Peninsula.

IN size and in the general markings of its plumage, this beautiful species is more closely allied to the *Falco Ponticerianus* of Latham, than to any other; but the total absence of the coloured stripe down the centre of the white feathers which clothe the head, neck and breast of the Australian bird, at once distinguishes it from its Indian ally.

The White-breasted Sea Eagle is very common on the northern and eastern portions of Australia, where it takes up its abode in the most secluded and retired parts of bays and inlets of the sea. Upon one occasion only did I meet with it within the colony of New South Wales, but I have several times received specimens from Moreton Bay; the individual alluded to above was observed soaring over the brushes of the Lower Hunter. The chief food of this species is fish, which it captures either by plunging down or by dexterously throwing out its foot while flying close to the surface of the water; such fish as swim near the surface being of course the only ones that become a prey to it: sometimes the captured fish is borne off to the bird's favourite perch, which is generally a branch overhanging the water, while at others, particularly if the bird be disturbed, it is borne aloft in circles over the head of the intruder and devoured while the bird is on the wing, with apparent ease. Its flight is slow and heavy near the ground, but at a considerable elevation it is easy and buoyant.

"This species," says Mr. Gilbert in his notes from Port Essington, "is pretty generally spread throughout the Peninsula and the neighbouring islands, and may be said to be tolerably abundant. It breeds from the beginning of July to the end of August. I succeeded in finding two nests, each of which contained two eggs, but I am told that three are sometimes found. The nest is formed of sticks with fine twigs or coarse grass as a lining; it is about two feet in diameter and built in a strong fork of the dead part of a tree: both of those I found were about thirty feet from the ground and about two hundred yards from the beach. The eggs, which are two inches and two lines in length by one inch and eight lines in breadth, are of a dirty white, having the surface spread over with numerous hair-like streaks and very minute dots of reddish brown, the former prevailing and assuming the form of hieroglyphics; these singular markings being most numerous at one end, sometimes at the larger at others at the smaller, the difference even occurring in the two eggs of the same nest."

The sexes are so much alike in colour that it is by the greater size of the female alone that they are to be distinguished; the young, on the other hand, differ considerably from the adult.

Head, neck, chest and upper part of the abdomen snow white; back, wings, lower part of the abdomen, thighs, upper and under tail-coverts rich chestnut red; first six primaries chestnut at the base and black at the tip; tail-feathers chestnut red on their upper surface, lighter beneath, the eight central feathers tipped with greyish white; irides light reddish yellow; cere pale yellowish white; orbits smoke-grey; upper mandible light ash-grey at the base, passing into sienna-yellow and terminating at the tip in light horn-colour; under mandible smoke-grey; tarsi cream-yellow, much brighter on all the large scales on the front of the tarsi and toes.

The figures are those of an adult and a young bird two-thirds of the natural size.